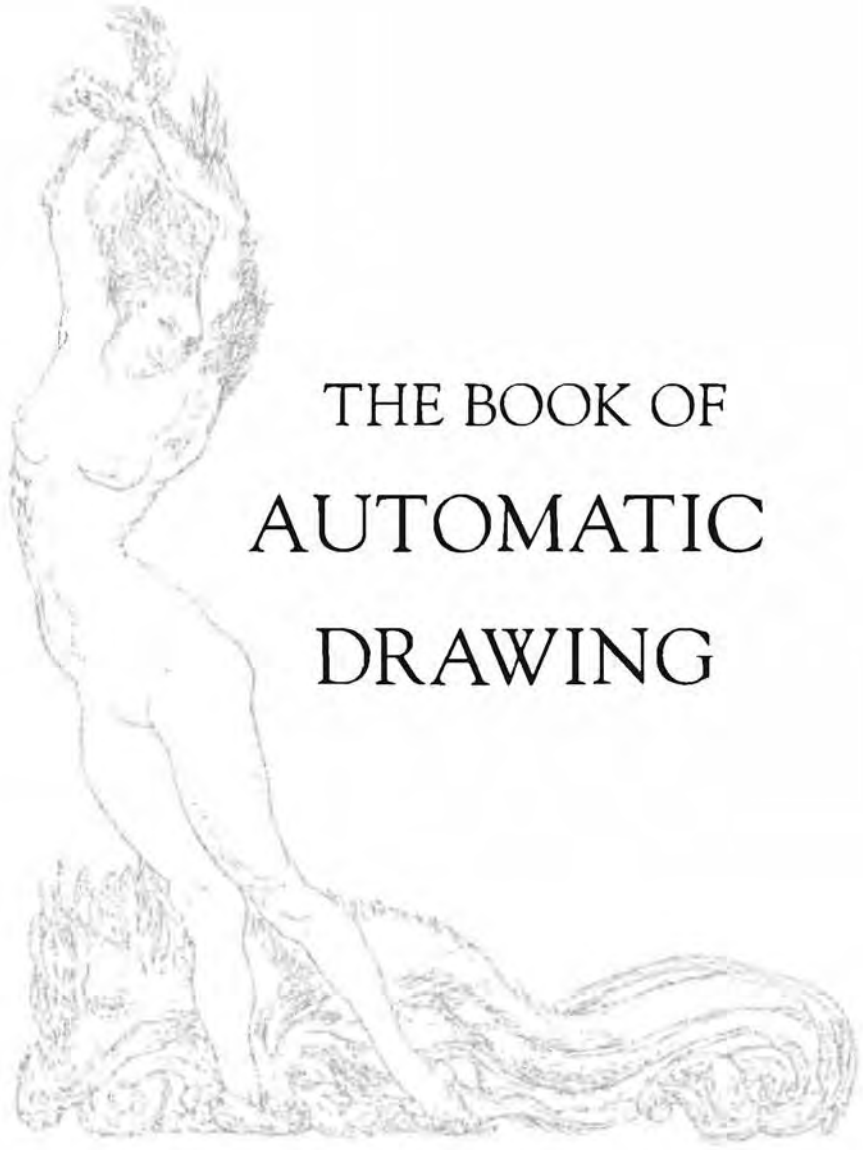
AUTOMATIC DRAWING

AUSTIN
OSMAN
SPARE

THE BOOK OF AUTOMATIC DRAWING

I-H-O BOOKS



THE BOOK OF AUTOMATIC DRAWING

AUSTIN OSMAN SPARE

Austin O'Hare

Automatic Drawing: A Discussion

HANNEN SWAFFER

with Automatic drawings by Mr Spare from Mr Swaffer's collection.

Mr Swaffer has long been an admirer of the art of Austin O. Spare, and his article on this man of genius is illustrated from drawings in his private collection. Mr Spare draws and paints to please himself, and has no complaints to make about being "ignored." But if Mr Swaffer is correct in believing that posterity will value Mr Spare's work, we wonder what excuse the art critics will have? After all, they are supposed to know real art when they see it.

Some of Spare's "automatic drawings," done in pencil, remind me of the work of Doré; others are rather like the later work of Aubrey Beardsley. The draughtsmanship, however, is, to my mind, more brilliant than any of which Beardsley or Doré was capable.

Spare's subjects are widely divergent. They pass from the noblest inspiration to the most evil. Some transport to a high spiritual ecstasy, inducing belief in a high human destiny. Others are despairing in their revelation of human nature wedlocked to the animal world. In some, spirituality breathes among the forms of satyrs.

All these drawings, says Mr Spare, are super-normal. He does not dogmatise about the method. He is experimenting. . . .

"In some cases the ideas are the result of my inward psychical experiences," Mr Spare told me, "things I have not necessarily seen, or outwardly experienced. In others, the drawings are automatic, started with no idea as to what form they shall take, and completed without conscious direction.

On some occasions, in order to do automatic drawings, Mr Spare stares into a mirror and induces self-hypnotism. In a hypnotic state, he sometimes goes on working for hours, awakening to find that he has covered pages and pages full of the most beautiful work. He cannot always control it. There are periods, sometimes for months at a time, he says, when, receiving no promptings from outside, he cannot work at all. At others he is unable to stop working.

"Although it was my strong wish to do some more drawings for next week's exhibition," he told me, when I saw him, "my pencil did not move for three months. On another occasion I worked on in a dream-state for twenty-four hours, finishing a book of fifty pages.

"Unknown to themselves, I believe many artists are inspired by outside forces, or that they work through their subconscious mind. The development of these powers will open up a new world.

"I believe that *Hamlet* was the result of a psychical experience of Shakespeare's, which found expression in the act form he had adopted; otherwise you cannot explain him.

"All significant art, I believe, comes from that source. It is inspiration, revelation, spiritual truth, which men express in the different ways they have developed.

"I am now trying to perfect a technique of automatic drawing, so that the best can be brought out in me. If we study the subconscious, we have much to learn.

"Prophecy and revelation are as possible today as they ever were. They can operate, if only you induce the conditions. What the conditions are we must discover.

"The prophets and the seers were hermits. Because of circumstances I have lived for months a hermit's life. Poverty has made me live alone. It has been partly choice, partly compulsion. The result has been psychic development."

Extract from *Adventures with Inspiration*

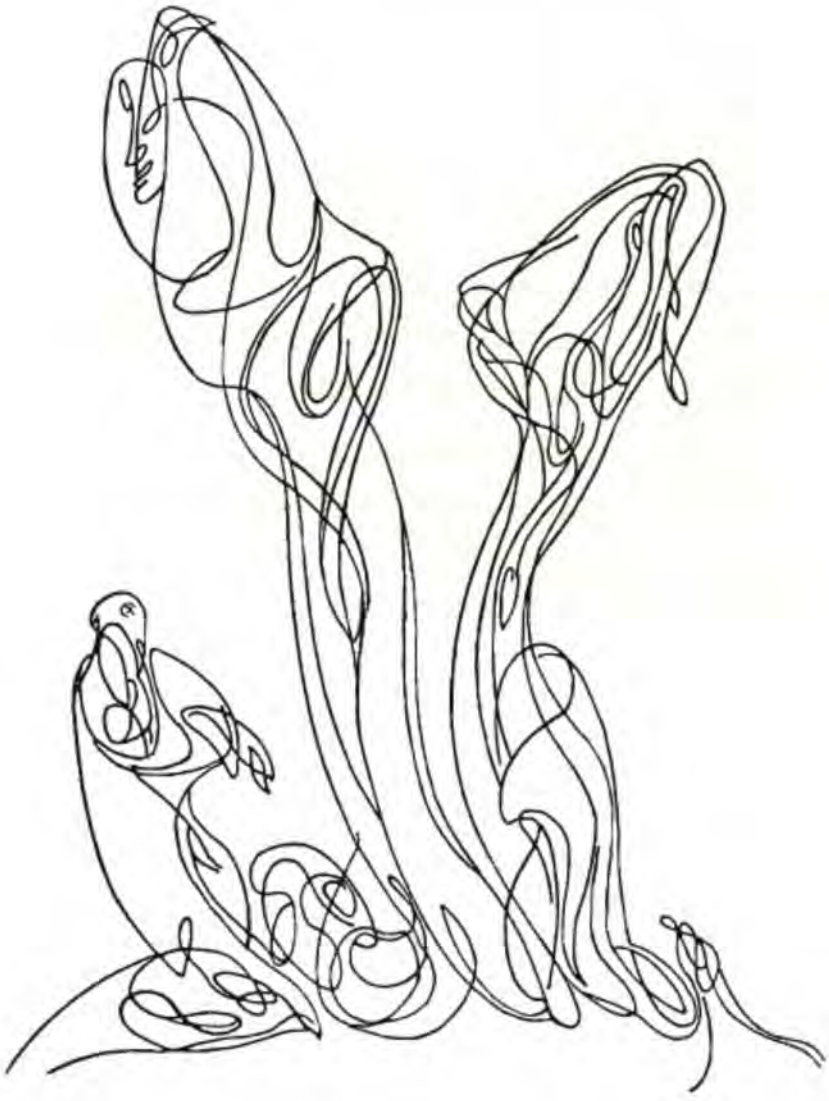
There now hang on one of my walls seven of his paintings, each so different in style and character that it is almost impossible to believe that the same hand was responsible for any two of them. And there rest on a table in my sitting-room overlooking Trafalgar Square three sketchbooks full of "automatic drawings" unique

in their mastery of line, unique, too, in their daring of conception.

Two other pictures that I possess were drawn by Spare in the darkness, by some dead artist, he believes. Both are psychic, not only in origin, but in subject. Although, unfortunately, the extremely delicate quality of the pencil work makes them unsuitable for hanging —
get quite close to them to see their details — I regard them as almost incomparable specimens of draughtsmanship. Both apparently illustrate the evolution of souls in a sphere of existence wider than our own. Each has beside its title — "Dissolution of Consciousness" or "The Ascent of the Fallen" — the words "automatic drawing."

"When you write on the back of some picture 'automatic drawing,' what do you mean?" I asked him once.

"It simply means to me something my conscious mind was not cognizant of when I was doing it," he explained. "I know more about it when I've done it than while I was drawing. That is, I become conscious often when I have committed myself on paper. Otherwise, it would



not be automatic. My subconscious mind might be aware of it, but not my conscious mind.

"The best illustration I can give is that, very often, when I've been working, I've not known what I was doing. I was working automatically. Then I've started to come back to normality, to normal consciousness, and found the room was quite dark, and that I'd been working away in darkness in which I could not see.

"The light has failed, perhaps, as I have been working, and I've gone on working in the dark. My speed has been fantastic. To use a metaphor, I have worked almost with 'the speed of light.'

"In one of the books of automatic drawings you bought, there are two 'deliberate ones,' to show the difference. They were all done in about four hours, the whole book, all except the last two on which I superimposed my conscious mind. I've begun the others purely automatically. I have let my hand do anything. If, when it was done, a form has suggested a tree, I've made it more obviously a tree, with just a few added strokes. If it has suggested an animal or a figure, I've filled it in with a minimum of circles or curves.

In contrast with the automatic drawings illustrating this article, you see on this page a conscious study in movement by Austin O. Spare. All we can do here is to give a hint of his mastery of line. To appreciate fully his genius one must see, and if possible, live with his paintings.

"During the automatic period, I am obsessed or possessed by the spirit of some artist, perhaps a dead artist. I don't exactly know. The only evidence I may have is that it's like Dürer or Blake, or like someone I've never heard of.

"Many artists, authors and musicians are partly automatic in the early stages of their work. They function in a quasi-consciousness, which is slightly different to subconsciousness. All creative people are born with this gift, on which learning and training can be superimposed. Like any other faculty, or ability, it can be cultivated.

"I define 'automatism' in art or writing as something in which the conscious mind is either occupied by some exterior thing or is totally unaware of the activity of the hands on the mind."

Even when a youth in his middle teens, Austin Spare drew abstract subjects, pictures of chaos, for instance. "Perhaps it was morbid," he says. "Some might have been by me. Some might have been the work of anybody. Then I published a book called *Earth Inferno*, using for the wording I illustrated my own version of Dante. That made a Press stunt. All newspapers hailed me as 'a genius.' I

had five hundred copies printed, and all were sold. The book cost five shillings. I coloured some of them and sold them for a guinea.

"I went on with black and white for perhaps five years. I made a living. A few years before the war of 1914, I published a book called *The Book of Pleasure*, which gave me a very big Press. It was a book on mysticism. Sir Claude Philips, of the *Daily Telegraph*, gave me great praise and the other papers copied him. That sort of established me as a mystic artist. I was doing quite well. Then I edited a magazine called *Form*, which was literary and artistic.

"When the war broke out, I joined the Army. When I left the Forces, the world was a very different place. Lots of things had changed. I found it very difficult to keep going on with what I had been doing. That pushed me into the abstract world — and there I have more or less remained.

"As for a glimmering of a knowledge of the occult, I have always had it in me from my childhood. It developed most just before the nineteen-fourteen war and afterwards."

"You accept, you say, the explanation that, in some way you don't understand, you are influenced by the other world?" I said to Spare.

"Definitely," he replied; "but I don't think it can be understood. You can tell when I have been influenced, by the difference in the styles of my work. Some are just portraits. Some are pure realism, otherwise pure surrealism. Some are symbolic, some a mixture."

"Do you believe in black magic?"

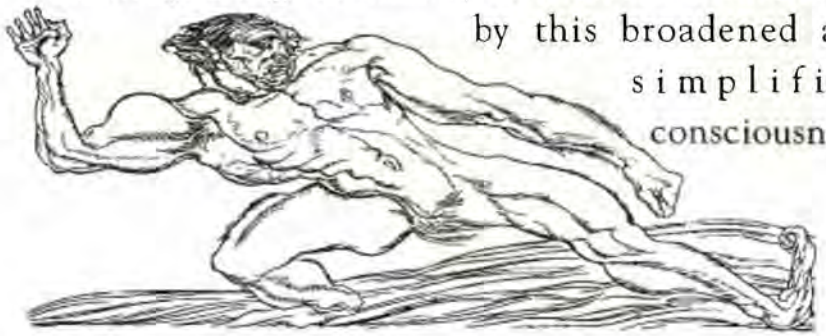
"Call it what you like — sorcery, if you choose. I think that's the most generous word. Still, I do not believe in black or white magic any more than I believe that black and white are the only two colours in the world."

Extract from *London Mystery Magazine*, Vol. 1 No. 5, Hulton Press

Automatic Drawing

by Austin O. Spare
& Frederick Carter

UT of the flesh of our mothers come dreams and memories of the Gods. Of other kind than the normal inducement of interest and increasing skill, there exists a continual pressure upon the artist of which he is sometimes partially conscious but rarely entirely aware. He learns early or late in his career that power of literal reproduction (such as that of the photographic apparatus) is not more than slightly useful to him. He is compelled to find out from his artist predecessors the existence, in representation of real form, of super-sessions of immediate accuracies; he discovers within himself a selective conscience and he is satisfied, normally, in large measure by the extensive field afforded by this broadened and simplified consciousness.

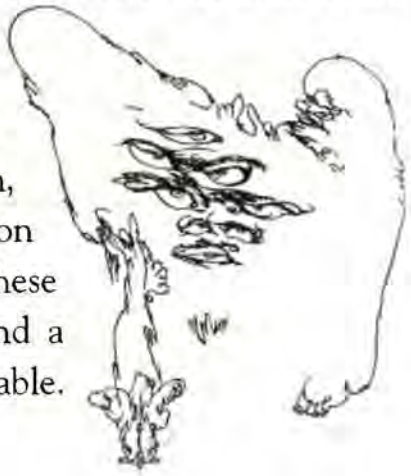


YET beyond this is a region and that a much greater one, for exploration. The objective understanding, as we see, has to be attacked by the artist and a subconscious method, for correction of conscious visual accuracy, must be used. No amount of manual skill and consciousness of error will produce good drawing. A recent book on drawing by a well-known painter is a case in point; there the examples of masters of draughtsmanship may be compared with the painter-author's own, side by side, and the futility of mere skill and interest examined. Therefore to proceed further, it is necessary to dispose of the "subject" in art also (that is to say the subject in the illustrative or complex sense). Thus to clear the mind of inessentials permits through a clear and transparent medium, without prepossessions of any kind, the most definite and simple forms and ideas to attain expression.

Notes on Automatic Drawing

AN "automatic" scribble of twisting and interlacing lines permits the germ of idea in the subconscious mind to express, or at least suggest itself to the consciousness. From this mass of procreative shapes, full of fallacy, a feeble embryo of idea may be selected and trained by the artist to full growth and power. By these means, may the profoundest depths of memory be drawn upon and the springs of instinct tapped.

YET let it not be thought that a person not an artist may by these means become one: but those artists who are hampered in expression, who feel limited by the hard conventions of the day and wish for freedom, who strive for self expression but have not attained to it, these may find in it a power and a liberty elsewhere undiscoverable.



Thus writes Leonardo da Vinci:— "Among other things, I shall not scruple to discover a new method of assisting the invention; which though trifling in appearance, may yet be of considerable service in opening the mind and putting it upon the scent of new thoughts, and it is this: if you look at some old wall covered with dirt, or the odd appearance of some streaked stones, you may discover several things like landskips, battles, clouds, uncommon attitude, draperies, etc. Out of this confused mass of objects the mind will be furnished with abundance of designs and subjects, perfectly new."
From another, a mystical writer "Renounce thine own will that the law of God may be within thee."

THE curious expression of character given by handwriting is due to the automatic or unconscious nature that it acquires by habit. So Automatic drawing, one of the simplest of psychic phenomena, is a means of characteristic expression and, if used with courage and honesty, of recording subconscious activities in the mind. The mental mechanisms used are those common in dreams, which create quick perception of relations in the unexpected, as wit, and psycho-neurotic symptoms.

Hence it appears that single or non-consciousness is an essential condition and as in all inspiration the product of involution not invention.

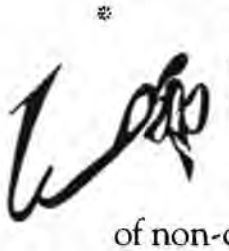
AUTOMATISM being the manifestation of latent desires (or wishes) the significance of the forms (the ideas) obtained represent the previously unrecorded obsessions.

ART becomes, by this illuminism or ecstatic power, a functional activity expressing in a symbolical language the *desire towards joy* unmodified — *the sense of the Mother of all things* — not of experience.

THIS means of vital expression releases the fundamental static truths which are repressed by education and customary habit and lie dormant in the mind. It is the means of becoming courageously individual; it implies spontaneity and disperses the cause of unrest and *ennui*.

THE dangers of this form of expression come from prejudice and personal bias of such nature as fixed intellectual conviction or personal religion (intolerance). These produce ideas of threat, displeasure or fear, and become obsessions.

IN the ecstatic condition of revelation from the subconscious, the mind elevates the sexual or inherited powers (this has no reference to moral theory or practise) and depresses the intellectual qualities. So a new atavistic responsibility is attained by daring to believe—to posses one's own beliefs—without attempting to rationalize spurious ideas from prejudiced and tainted intellectual sources.



AUTOMATIC drawings can be obtained by such methods as concentrating on a *Sigil — by any means of exhausting mind and body pleasantly in order to obtain a condition of non-consciousness — by wishing in opposition to the real desire after acquiring an organic impulse towards drawing.

THE Hand must be trained to work freely and without control, by practise in making simple forms with a continuous involved line without afterthought, i.e. its intention should just escape consciousness.

DRAWINGS should be made by allowing the hand to run freely with the least possible deliberation. In time shapes will be found to evolve, suggesting conceptions, forms and ultimately having personal or individual style.

THE Mind in a state of oblivion, without desire towards reflection or pursuit of materialistic intellectual suggestions, is in a condition to produce successful drawings of one's *personal* ideas, symbolic in meaning and wisdom.
By this means sensation may be visualized.

AUTOMATIC DRAWING AS MEANS TO ART

Art as "Need-not-be" — The Vital Religion

THE VIRTUE OF ART IS THAT IT CAN contradict (any law of) Science, to be Art it need not be true to Science. It teaches that composition, balance or proportion, can be obtained by any principle or exaggeration, so points at freedom in a deliberation that already exists.

Were you to say a certain principle is bad as Art (or as composition, colour, etc.) it would simply be the chance for originality, and you could make a wonderful Art by utilizing only the prohibited or bad principle. The one law of Art is its own spontaneity. Its pleasure and freedom. How mystic, pure, and simple its wish; it

and vital The one law of Art is its own spontaneity. Its pleasure and freedom. How mystic, pure, and simple its wish; it has no idea of potential Divinity! Decoration is its creed and vital allegory its belief. Being the "Free Morality," it has no sin — then most assuredly Art is "all" we dare express without excuse. So what is not Art is Science or a moral Photography. (True) Art being inspiration is (symbolic) formula of the Science it does not admit.

Art suggests, so is the best medium for conveying wisdom, — its very suggestion thinks freedom. Art is that beauty which may be born of anything, but not by a formula of balance or proportion beauty itself. Ugliness is that which the formula does not allow: hence there is never beauty without this ugliness which becomes transmuted by its superabundance.

Art is the instinctive application (to observation or sensations) of the knowledge latent in the sub-consciousness.

Bad Art (fundamentally weak, as in composition, etc.) arises when a law, code or mannerism (always something learnt) does not allow (by forgetting the necessary negligence) spontaneity. Art only is Eternal Wisdom;

what is not Art soon perishes. Art is the sub-conscious love of *all* things. Learning will cease and Reality become known when it comes to pass that every man is an Artist.

Automatic Drawing

Automatic Drawing is a vital means of expressing what is at the back of your mind (the dream-man)* and is a quick and easy means to begin being courageously original — eventually it evolves itself into the coveted spontaneous expression and the safe omniscience is assured.

Automatic drawing is obtained by the Sigil Formula simplified (first make the desire to draw organic) and is a means of acquiring sub-conscious activity pictorially expressed: it is the easiest of Psychic Phenomena. The hand has to be trained from the accustomed practice to work freely and of itself. Exercise making these and other simple forms, swiftly and continuously: –

* The Dwellers on the Threshold of the sub-consciousness, in their suffering, literally the conscience or live morality. Hence all automatic drawing in its beginning, is sentimental or morbid: their plausibility must not be feared, otherwise you express nothing better than your own displeasure.

etc., and in a variety of directions and shapes, till you accomplish them without conscious guidance. Then allow the hand to draw of itself, i.e., scribble,* with the least deliberation possible. Eventually this scribble evolves form, style, and meaning. When the mind is oblivious, great success is assured. Looking at the thumb in the light of a moonbeam, till it is opalescent and suggests a fantastic reflection of yourself is a means to great perfection and extraordinary results are attained.

The drawings are symbolic in their meaning or wisdom. To determine what you want to draw, such as a particular Karma or your idea of a Horse, make that Sigil and retain the mind on it. By these means all past incarnations can be expressed, all creations seen without stirring foot.

Automatic drawings are also the means of symbolically visualising sensation, most in this book are such, and my first effort (about 1900).

They are also means of (fortune) telling the ultimate reaction by deducing from past actions. (Chapters on omens, fortune-telling, and prophecy omitted.)

*A continuous line in evolution that escapes returning to its origin, by continual afterthought suggesting new movement, *i.e.*, a dancing line.

Not the rebellion of childhood to learning manifest as a mantra or giddy whirl.

Automatic drawing is a cure for insanity because it exposes the wounded sentiment allowing the consciousness to recognise what is obsessing and thus reason (control) begins afresh.

Note on Sacred Letters

Sacred letters preserve belief from the Ego, so that the belief returns again and again to the sub-consciousness, till its fullness breaks resistance. Its meaning misses intelligence, but is understood by emotion.

Each letter in its pictorial aspect relates to a Sex principle, and its modifications as completeness.

Twenty-two in number, they correspond to a first cause. Each analogous to an idea of desire, and are a symbolic cosmogony. Thus the third letter is: The dual principle or conceptive faculty.

By knowledge of the first letter, one is familiar with the whole alphabet, and the thousands they imply. They are the knowledge of desire. Embracing a positive system of grammar which allows easy, non-conflicting expression, and reading of difficult and complex principles; idea that at present escape conception.

A book of Automatic drawing

by Austin Osman Spare

A book
of
Automatic drawing
containing: Calligraphic titles, signatures
& other devices together with
Self portraits
&
allegorical frontispeice
by Austin Osman Spare
april 1925 mcmxxv

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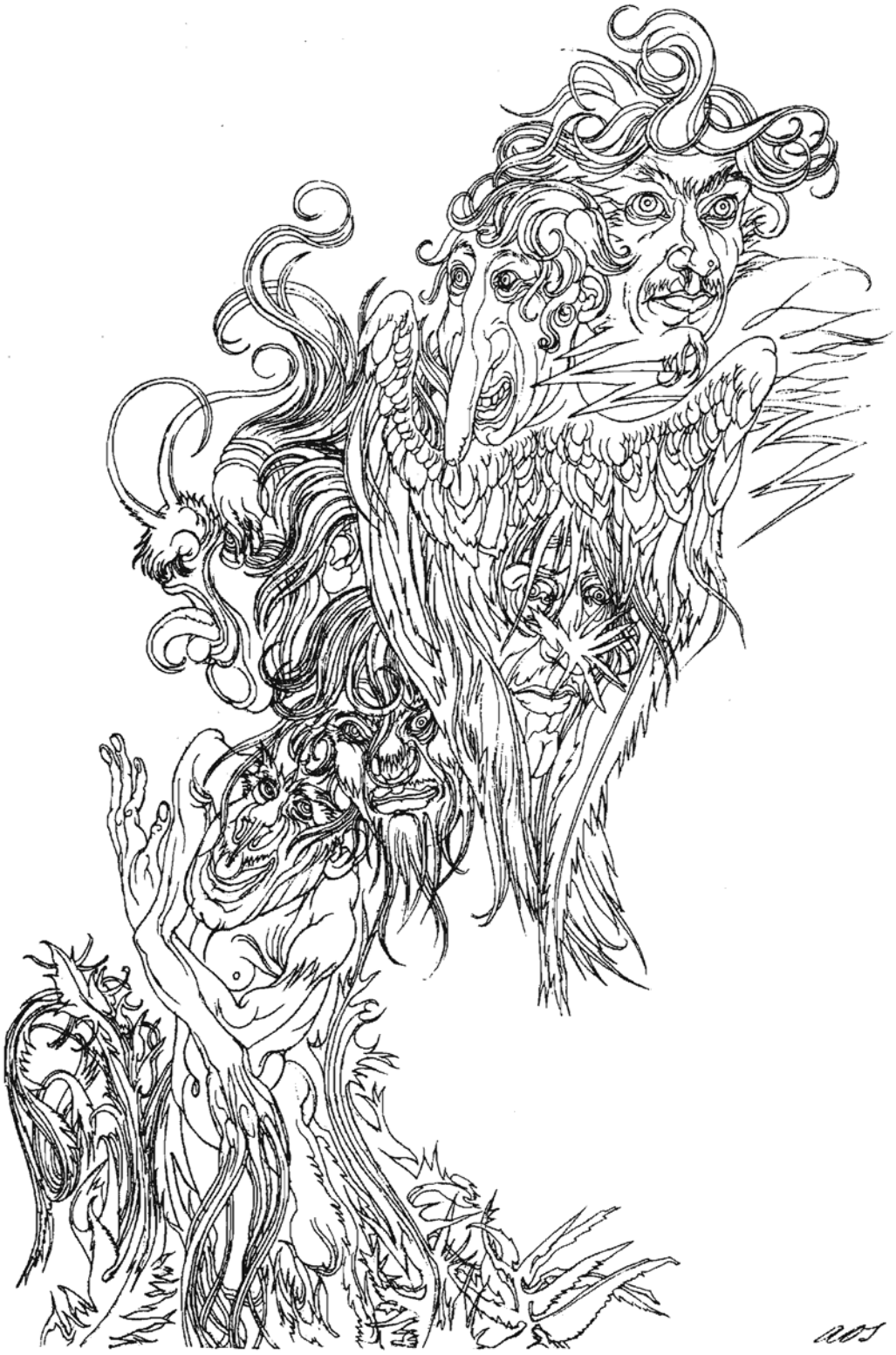

sine curve calligraphy

Signatures & sigils

of

Austin Osman Spare

He has found wisdom who knows how to spend

Austin Osman Spare

1925

finis
Great is he who pleasures this difficult life

Consistent with other directions of abstract knowledge, the threshold of the occult is the market-place for the charlatan. Coinage is sometimes different — lies have a strange longevity and fecundity — truth becomes buried.

What stupidities benight the assertion that *anything* was created unrelated to all else; if things were entirely separate, complete, they would be static and quickly exhausted. Yet we live by every means a partiveness and make our ignorance as permanent as possible . . . and nothing seems more lasting than a lie. Man is a chaos of strange paradoxes, an accomplishment of lies and pretences proportionate to his knowledge. And what lies and delusions we create in the knowing. Better for most to unknow what they think they know, for their own good.

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